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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000477

SIPDIS

FOR S/CT, DS, EUR, AND NEA

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER](#) [TERRORISM](#)

SUBJECT: NO NEW SECURITY THREAT IN YEMEN; FRENCH NOT CLOSING

REF: ROBERTS/MISENHEIMER TELCON 3/1/04

11. (C) SUMMARY. French DCM told DCM 3/2 that media reports of French diplomatic closure in Sanaa due to new local security threats are in error. The recent Zawahiri audiotape prompted Paris to advise French embassies worldwide to review security. In Yemen, this instruction prompted an ongoing review of French sites and several prudent security upgrades. French DCM praised responsiveness of Ministry of Interior. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) DCM called on French DCM Jean Louis Rysto 3/2 to discuss media reports that French had closed Embassy, Cultural Center and/or the French School in response to new security threats in Yemen. Rysto informed DCM that all such reports are entirely/entirely in error, and explained current security-related steps taken by the French mission.

13. (C) According to Rysto, the recently circulated audiotape attributed to al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri included expressions of hostility to French interests in connection with the hejab controversy in French schools. In response, said Rysto, Paris sent a cable to nearly all its embassies worldwide advising of the Zawahiri statement and ordering security review and adjustment as needed. He stressed that France had no/no information whatsoever on any new threat specific to Yemen. The Zawahiri statement was not geographically specific.

14. (C) Upon receipt of the cable from Paris, the French Ambassador met urgently with Interior Minister Alimi on 2/27. Follow-on contacts, including a joint visit by French embassy representatives and MOI officials to main French sites (embassy, ambassador's residence, French Cultural Center, French Center for Social Studies (CFES), and the French School) on 2/29, led to installation of additional concrete traffic barriers and deployment of additional Yemeni security personnel at the sites.

15. (C) In order to facilitate the security review, the School released students 3 days early for a scheduled holiday. It will reopen as scheduled on 3/13. In the meantime, additional on-site security measures will be put in place. Rysto considers the French School particularly exposed, as it adjoins several busy downtown streets (in contrast to the American-curriculum Sanaa International School, which is in an isolated suburb and has excellent setback and perimeter patrols).

16. (C) Similarly, the French Cultural Center is closed and will reopen later this week. The Cultural Center will close during April and relocate to a more secure property, a move already in preparation before the Zawahiri message. Neither the embassy nor CFES has closed at all. Rysto expressed frustration that CFES staff focus on academic/cultural outreach and resent any security restrictions, but noted that they will be compelled to accept at least some on-site security measures.

17. (C) A separate meeting between DATT and his French counterpart, and telcon between P/E Chief and French consular assistant, elicited parallel accounts of the French security review.

18. (C) Comment: While not keyed to any local threat information, the security moves being undertaken by the French are prudent and reasonable. Their facilities all lack setback and previously had minimal perimeter security. In fact, Rysto noted that French Ambassador Moureau had chosen to play up the worldwide caution from Paris in order to "send a signal" to the ROYG -- i.e. to obtain greater security attention from the MOI -- and to Paris -- to show that the recently arrived ambassador is taking security seriously. He deemed the measure successful, as the MOI has acted quickly to provide additional security support.

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